

Perimenopause, Menopause, and Hormone therapy

The time when your menstrual cycle stops for good is called menopause. Most women reach menopause in their late 40s or early 50s.

During the years leading up to menopause, levels of two female hormones, estrogen and progesterone, begin to change. These changes signal that your body is getting ready to stop menstruating. This time leading up to menopause is called perimenopause.

Most women begin perimenopause between ages 35 and 50. Perimenopause usually lasts around 5 to 7 years. You can still get pregnant during this time, so you may want to use some method of birth control.

For many women, the shifting levels of hormones during perimenopause cause physical and emotional changes. Some of these changes may be uncomfortable, but there are many ways to relieve the discomfort.

The changes could include any of the following:

- Skipped periods.
- Irregular bleeding.
- Hot flashes.
- Mood swings.
- Sleep problems.
- Painful intercourse from vaginal dryness.

If you have not had a period for at least a year, you are likely to be in menopause. At this point, your hormone levels drop, so you are no longer producing eggs. Once this happens, there is no chance of becoming pregnant.

What happens after menopause?

- Women are at higher risk for some diseases, such as osteoporosis (bone thinning) and heart disease. Their bodies no longer make the estrogen that helps protect them against these diseases. (For more information on preventing these diseases, select [Osteoporosis](#) and [Reducing Your Risk for Heart Disease](#).)
- Some women also continue to have symptoms such as hot flashes and vaginal dryness.

Hormone Therapy. Hormone therapy increases the levels of the hormones estrogen, progesterone, or both in your body. If you are approaching menopause or have gone through menopause, you may be considering hormone therapy to relieve symptoms of menopause or to reduce your risk for diseases such as osteoporosis.

Hormone therapy may reduce your risk for fracture, bone thinning, and colorectal cancer. On the other hand, there is evidence that some hormone therapies may increase your risk for breast cancer, heart disease, blood clots, stroke, and gall bladder disease. For women with mild or no symptoms of menopause, the potential harms of hormone therapy may outweigh the benefits.

If you are considering hormone therapy, it is important to be well informed about these benefits and harms and how they apply to you specifically. Your doctor can help you decide.



Ask your doctor or nurse:

How can I relieve the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause?

Is taking hormones right for me?

If so, how long can I take hormones safely?

Reference Source: “The Pocket Guide to Good Health for Adults.” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: May 2003.